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OPDEC PLANNING: A COMMANDER'S IMPERATIVE

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by
Carol West
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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: Carol West

17 May 1993

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93 7 09 038

93-15654



REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION Unclassified		1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS None	
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY		3. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF REPORT DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.	
2b. DECLASSIFICATION / DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE			
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)		5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)	
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT	6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable) C	7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION	
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) NAVAL WAR COLLEGE NEWPORT, R.I. 02841		7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)	
8a. NAME OF FUNDING / SPONSORING ORGANIZATION	8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)		10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS	
		PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.
		TASK NO.	WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO.
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) OPDEC PLANNING: A COMMANDER'S IMPERATIVE (U)			
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) West, Carol CDR, USN			
13a. TYPE OF REPORT FINAL	13b. TIME COVERED FROM TO	14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 93 MAY 17	15. PAGE COUNT 31
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.			
17. COSATI CODES		18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)	
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP	
		Operational Deception Planning (OPDEC)	
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)			
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20. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT. <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS		21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION Unclassified	
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL CHAIRMAN, OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT		22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) 841-3414	22c. OFFICE SYMBOL C

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Abstract of
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OPDEC PLANNING: A COMMANDER'S IMPERATIVE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years military commanders have waged war over the same terrain to obtain changing political objectives. For equally as long, battle-tested commanders have studied the art of war and passed to successive generations of commanders the lessons they learned waging war and the principles of war they espoused.

One maxim polished through time and universally recognized as a principle of war is that if surprise can be attained over the enemy, it may greatly contribute to victory. In Joint Pub 0-1, Basic National Defense Doctrine, U.S. military commanders are charged to: "Take action against enemies at times, places and in manners for which they neither are prepared nor expect," to endeavor to achieve the fundamental principle of surprise.¹ Achieving surprise, as Clausewitz noted, "may confuse the enemy and lower his morale" becoming a "force multiplier."² But, to achieve surprise requires a stratagem, a means or tool to achieve ends. That tool is deception. From the days of ancient Greeks who gave us the first deception doctrine in the mythological story of the stratagem of the wooden horse, deception has been universally recognized by commanders as a "force multiplier" they must add

to their operational art toolbox.

This paper focuses on the use of deception by the U.S. commander who must orchestrate military operations and campaigns at the operational level of war. First, in Chapter II, deception is defined and discussed. Next, to provide a mental frame of reference for the next chapter, U.S. joint doctrine on operational deception concepts and planning considerations are reviewed and analyzed. Chapter IV provides historical analysis of operational deception planning in conjunction with Allied campaign plans for both the invasion of Western Europe in World War II and the offensive operations against the Iraqis in the recent Persian Gulf War. That analysis is presented along with insights of the respective campaign commanders who are credited with orchestrating the two most successful deception operations in American military history: General Dwight D. Eisenhower and General H. Norman Schwarzkopf. Chapter V provides a conclusion supporting strong attention by today's operational commanders to their role in planning and orchestrating operational deception to insure they are best prepared for tomorrow's war.

Information for this paper was obtained through a review of the literature available in the Naval War College library. Special terms unique to this topic are defined throughout the paper.

CHAPTER II

DECEPTION

What is deception? Webster's defines it as "the act of causing another to accept as true of valid what is false or invalid."³ Croizat states deception "requires that a set of circumstances be manipulated in such a manner that an opponent analyzing them will be led to an erroneous conclusion and hence to defeat or failure. The basic object of any deception is therefore the mind of the opponent. Its purpose is to permit the achievement of surprise."⁴

"Deception has long been recognized as one of the most important elements inherent in warfare."⁵ Over 2,000 years ago Sun Tzu, the great Chinese general, prescribed in the Art of War: "A military operation involves deception. Even though you are competent, appear to be incompetent. Though effective, appear to be ineffective."⁶ Deception has also been described in the literature as "an opportunity to prolong the enemy's indecision until any decision he makes is too late to have significance."⁷ Thus, if the enemy can be deceived entirely or even only for a certain period of time, military operations may be shortened or victory more quickly and easily achieved.

Deception activities are designed to mislead the enemy by manipulation, distortion, or falsification of evidence to

induce him to react in a manner prejudicial to his interests."⁸ Joint Pub 0-1 cites "two basic approaches to deception."⁹ The classic deception is to "misdirect the enemy toward a line of action which favors the friendly cause."¹⁰ In this case a commander with limited forces may deceive the enemy into holding his own troops in position ready to fight a non-existent force while he maneuvers in secrecy to mass for an attack. The second "approach is to increase uncertainty in order to forestall the enemy's timely reaction."¹¹ The commander who realizes his troops are not ready to battle a superior force may use this approach to buy time to build up his forces.

Military Deception. Joint Pub 3-58, Doctrine for Operational Deception, defines military deception as:

Actions executed to mislead foreign decision makers, causing them to derive and accept desired appreciations of military capabilities, intentions, operations, or other activities that evoke foreign actions that contribute to the originator's objectives.¹²

Paraphrased, the three categories of military deception are:

Strategic. Designed to result in foreign national policies and actions which support our national objectives, policies and strategic military plans.

Tactical. By and in support of operational commanders against the pertinent threat, to result in opposing operational actions which favor our plans and operations.

Military Departments/Services. About military systems, doctrine, tactics, techniques or other activities to result in foreign actions which increase or maintain our own capabilities relative to adversaries.¹³

Operational Deception. To conduct operational deception (OPDEC) is to orchestrate the use of military deception activities from any or all of the above three levels in support of overall campaign objectives. OPDEC is defined in Joint Pub 3-58 as: "Military deception conducted by commanders of combatant commands and joint task forces in support of overall campaign objectives."¹⁴

Joint Pub 3-58 further specifies procedures for planning, executing and evaluating operational deception activities. The key concept to "take away" from a discussion of OPDEC planning is that deception planning "parallels and complements" operations planning. OPDEC planning is not an "add on" to an already complete operations plan. Deception will not be appropriate to every operation, but should be considered during all planning."¹⁵ Deception planners must work hand in hand with operations planners to develop "OPDEC concepts to support each potential course of action. As with all operational planning, it is an iterative process that requires continual re-examination of objectives, stories, means and execution."¹⁶

Deception operation events in joint and combined operations are "normally executed at the component level or below" and are critically monitored by the deception staff for the Joint Task Force commander. According to Joint Pub 3-58, "future OPDEC operations should build upon the lessons learned, good and bad, from previous operations."¹⁷

OPDEC and the Commander. The operational level commander is charged to plan and conduct military operations designed to produce a specific military condition toward accomplishing strategic objectives. His operation plan must maximize his force's capabilities and minimize those of his opponent. OPDEC activities, at the proper place and time, may maximize his operations plan by misleading the enemy decision maker. Even if the opponent is not completely deceived, any advantage gained in time or position may prove beneficial to the overall operation.

Understanding that deception activities can be undertaken at all three levels of war, strategic, operational and tactical, the forward-thinking operational commander envisions how deception activities can be integrated into all phases of his plan. He looks for "force-multipliers" and "enemy show-stoppers." He asks, "What military conditions can be produced through the use of deception?" He envisions how he can attain his military objective as quickly as possible. What if he can win without fighting? Can he bluff the enemy commander into improperly deploying his troops or surrendering? Can he confuse him? If conflict is necessary, can he minimize casualties? He considers what sequence of actions or coordinated actions would be most likely to help produce the military conditions necessary to realize a strategic aim. He conceives, focuses and exploits available activities to

develop them into a campaign plan. He decides when, where, why and how forces will accept or decline battle with reference to the strategic design. His efficiency and effectiveness depends on his mastery of the skills and abilities expected of a military commander and decision maker and his ability to practice the operational art.¹⁸

CHAPTER III

OPDEC PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Deception activities cannot be planned in a void, rather they must be based on the commander's estimate of a situation. What are the enemy's capabilities and what are our corresponding possible courses of action? Listed below are eight categories of planning considerations for OPDEC development, paraphrased from Joint Pub 3-58.¹⁹ As the focus of this paper is an analysis of deception planning process through the eyes of the commander, these planning considerations have been written in question format to better envision how the operational commander should view the OPDEC planning process as he oversees the overall planning of the campaign plan. In each category below key words are underlined to add emphasis to the learning process:

Situation Analysis. What are my combat objectives for the operation plan? My capabilities? Our allies? The enemy's? What are our corresponding possible courses of action? How does the enemy process, filter, ascribe meaning to, and use information? How is he likely to analyze and react to data we feed him?

Objective Formulation. What action or non-action by the enemy do we want? Will OPDEC be appropriate to this

operation? Why or why not? Who is the enemy decision maker, the target, and what action must he take, where, and how long must the deception hold? Is our target really capable of performing/conducting the required action/reaction?

Desired Perception. What do we want the enemy commander to see, think and do? Identify them. If historically it's been shown to be easier and more effective to reinforce an already existing belief in the enemy commander's (decision maker's) mind than to establish a new one, can we do that?

Story Fabrication. What false story will we create that will cause the enemy commander to incorrectly estimate the situation and then do what we want? Our story must be believable, verifiable, consistent and executable. It must correspond with the enemy commander's perceptions of our real intentions and capabilities. I understand I must be willing to devote assets to sell the story so that my opponent will be able to observe something which is real or he believes is real. Will he be able to verify the veracity of the story through multiple channels? Our story must be consistent with psychological operations objectives and activities. It must match the enemy's understanding of actual friendly doctrine, campaign strategy, battlefield tactics and the current operational situation. Any "observable" critical information which conflicts with our story line should be covered through the use of effective operations security (OPSEC). Is our

fable going to sell well enough and stick long enough for us to be able to achieve our objective?

Means Selection. What are the methods, resources and techniques we should select from the following list of means in Joint Pub 3-58 to convey our story to the targeted enemy commander?

Physical. Operational activities and resources such as, military operations (exercises, reconnaissance, training activities, feints, ruses, demonstrations and movement of forces); dummy and decoy equipment and devices; tactics; logistic actions, stockpiles and repair activities; and test and evaluation activities.

Technical. Military materiel resources and their associated operating techniques, which can involve deliberate radiation, reradiation, alteration, absorption, or reflection of energy; emission or suppression of chemical or biological odors; emission or suppression of nuclear particles; and radio, television or sound broadcasting.

Administrative. Includes resources, methods and techniques designed to convey or deny oral, pictorial, documentary or other physical evidence.

Means must be coordinated and enough means used to maximize the probability that the target will receive and believe our story. What intelligence gathering capabilities does the

enemy have: Human? Measurement and signature? Imagery? Signals? If we can't exploit a channel, will we be able to block it through effective OPSEC?

Feedback. I understand our hardest task may be to set up a system to continually receive feedback on the success or failure of our OPDEC plan. Certainly, if we attain our combat objectives that's feedback, but it might not have been as a result of the deception. How will we know if and when our story succeeded, failed, was compromised or resulted in unintended effects, or if it should continue, be modified or be terminated?

Termination Planning. When will our deception plan end? Will we conceal the OPDEC efforts or will we be unable to do so? I understand there are two ways we can go: (1) Conceal the fact that OPDEC was used so we may use the same tactics and techniques another day, or (2) Tell the world. The latter may help denigrate the effectiveness of the enemy commander or leadership, which may be one of our psychological operations goals.

Risk Analysis. What happens if the deception fails? Would that compromise our ability to attain our combat objectives? What if the enemy target doesn't receive our story, won't believe it, is slow or unable to react, acts in unforeseen ways or the deception is compromised? Would this place undue

risk on friendly operations? What if the deception is too successful and the target continues to act upon the deception after the desired time window has passed, thus impacting on follow-on friendly operations? Can we live with too much success? Finally, are the risks we are taking worth the possible benefits of deception? Do our operation and OPDEC plans truly complement each other and have we successfully blended them together to maximize our chances for attaining our combat objectives. If so, let's go!

CHAPTER IV

OPDEC PLANNING: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

To better understand the OPDEC planning process historical analysis and insights of commanders who have planned and executed deception operations in campaigns at the operational level of war can be reviewed and analyzed. The two largest and most successful deception operations in modern U.S. military history were conducted in conjunction with the Allied campaign for the invasion of Western Europe in World War II and the Coalition offensive operations against the Iraqis in the recent Persian Gulf War. The two commanders responsible for orchestrating those campaigns were General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander for the invasion and reconquest of Western Europe in World War II, and General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, Commander in Chief, Central Command and Commander, Allied Forces for the Persian Gulf War. Their remembrances of the purposes and uses of deception activities in their campaigns are briefly examined from the reference of the eight planning considerations of Joint Pub 3-58 to further our insight into the operational planning process from the operational commander's perspective.

Eisenhower, Bodyguard and Planning Overlord.

During World War II in the European theater both the Allies and Germans liberally used strategic and tactical deception

operations to support operation plans. Muller, in "A German Perspective on Allied Deception Operations," reported that while tactical deception was usually successful, many times strategic deception was less successful, a failure, or even counter-productive.²⁰ By April 1944, "the German analysts were well aware that gigantic deception operations were taking place to mislead them about the place and time of the imminent invasion of Europe."²¹ They didn't know, however, that British intelligence had broken the German code and the Allies were able to read most of the signals between Hitler and his generals throughout the war. This special intelligence was code-named Ultra. Through Ultra, top Allied commanders were fed precise information on the composition, strength and location of enemy forces and usually knew beforehand exactly what the enemy intended to do in many operations and battles. This intelligence coup greatly contributed to Allied success and must be considered in a discussion of their deception efforts. Ultra provided the Allies the all-important feedback system they needed to monitor their success at deceiving their enemy.²²

The Allies constructed an operations plan for the invasion in Normandy and code-named it "Overlord." Meanwhile, to support the invasion, deception planners prepared a plan called "Bodyguard," an "overall strategy for a number of cover and deception operations--a "game plan" to mislead the enemy about, and to obscure the truth of, Allied intentions in

northwest Europe in 1944."²³ In January 1944, Eisenhower's staff briefed him on Bodyguard's two objectives:

- (1) Through a coalition of intrigues, compel Hitler to disperse his forces throughout Europe so that he would not have sufficient strength in Normandy to defeat the invasion.
- (2) Delay his response to the invasion by confusing and disrupting the entire German signals, intelligence, supply and administrative systems.²⁴

"To achieve those objectives, it was explained, Bodyguard proposed to fabricate a war plan that was just close enough to the truth to seem credible to the Fuehrer, but would mislead him completely about the time and place of the invasion."²⁵

Bodyguard was designed to target Hitler to persuade him to believe six strategical considerations which would, in turn--if he accepted them as true--influence his preparations for, and his response to, D-Day."²⁶ Bodyguard's aim was to convince Hitler and the Generals of his high command that "the Allies would continue to pursue the peripheral strategy of 1943, and that a cross-Channel attack could not possible be made before July of 1944."²⁷ They would reinforce Hitler's belief, not change it.

Bodyguard "had no less than thirty-six subordinate plans and scores of associated stratagems....those that were intended to disguise Allied intentions in northern and northwestern Europe, and to conceal the secrets" of the invasion were code-named "Fortitude."²⁸ "I like all this," Eisenhower is said to have written on his copy of Bodyguard.²⁹ Strategically, the Allies needed Hitler to believe that Allied expeditions still

might occur in the Balkans and Scandinavia. From all evidence the Allies had, strategically Bodyguard was working.

"But would Fortitude be as effective? Eisenhower was skeptical, for it was almost impertinent to imagine that the LCS (the London Controlling Section, Britain's deception planners) might outfox the most proficient military organization in history--the German General Staff--in every operational theater of the war throughout the three most crucial periods of Neptune (Overlord)--before, during and after the assault."³⁰ As John Keegan recounted in The Second World War, Operation Fortitude:

...centred on the implantation in the consciousness of the German intelligence--the Wehrmacht's Abwehr and the army's Foreign Armies West section--of the existence, wholly fictitious, of a First US Army Group (FUSAG), located opposite the Pas de Calais in Kent and Sussex. False radio transmissions from FUSAG were sent over the air; false references were made to it in bona-fide messages. General Patton, whose reputation as a hard-driving army leader was known to the Germans, was mentioned as its commander. Moreover, to reinforce the notion that FUSAG would debark on the short route to the Reich, the Allied air forces in their programme of bombardment preparatory to Overlord dropped three times the tonnage east of the Seine as they did to the west. By 9 January 1944 the deception had borne fruit: an Ultra intercept referred to FUSAG on that day and others followed. It was the proof the Fortitude operators needed that their plan was working. They could not, of course, expect to distract the attentions of the Germans from Normandy, the chosen landing site, for good; but they hoped to minimise German anticipation of a Normandy landing until it was actually mounted, and thereafter keep alive the anxiety that the "real" invasion would follow in the Pas de Calais at a later stage.³¹

Eisenhower's remembrances of the process of planning deception operations for Operation Overlord follow:

Along with the general plan of operations we thoroughly

considered means of deceiving the enemy as to the point and timing of attack. Our purpose was to convince him that we intended to strike directly across the Channel at its narrowest point, against the stronghold of Calais. In many ways great advantages would have accrued to us could we have successfully attacked in this region. Not only were the beaches the best along the coast, they were closest to the British ports and to the German border. The enemy, fully appreciating these facts, kept strong forces in the area and fortified that particular section of coast line more strongly than any other. The defenses were so strong that none of us believed that a successful assault from the sea could be made except at such a terrific cost that the whole expedition might find itself helpless to accomplish anything of a positive character, after it got ashore. But we counted upon the enemy believing that we would be tempted into this operation, and the wide variety of measures we took for convincing him were given extraordinary credence by his Intelligence division.¹²

History remembers Bodyguard, Fortitude and Overlord as the most successful blending in one campaign of deception activities at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of war. Eisenhower, personally highly skilled in the operational art, backed by superb operations planners, deception planners and the secret of Ultra, and strengthened by air superiority over the Channel at the time of the invasion, is remembered for his superb orchestration of all Allied efforts which contributed to the invasion. As we have seen, deception directly supported General Eisenhower's first combat objective: to land his troops at Normandy and buy them time to set up a beachhead. Through deception he was able to reinforce his opponent's belief: they would land later elsewhere.

History will repeat itself in the next case study as another "irrational actor" is subdued by a Coalition force in a

brilliant, albeit shorter, campaign of deception.

Schwarzkopf's Deception Operations Plan. The United States most recent war with Iraq found the U.S. leading Coalition forces in a campaign to eject Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Objectives of the Persian Gulf War were to counter Iraqi aggression, secure Kuwait and provide for the establishment of the legitimate government in Kuwait. Operation Desert Storm, the offensive operations undertaken to achieve Coalition objectives, was a single theater campaign orchestrated by General Schwarzkopf. Among the operational imperatives outlined in the final campaign plan were three involving deception:

- (1) Use strategic deception to portray a defensive posture.
- (2) Use operational deception to fix or divert Republican Guards and other heavy units away from main effort.
- (3) Use tactical deception to facilitate penetration of barriers.

But a review of the Final Report to Congress on the Conduct of the Persian Gulf War reveals that between October 6, 1990, when the initial concept for ground operations was briefed and rejected, and December 20, 1990, when the Secretary of Defense approved the final campaign plan, a lot of sweat and concern went into the planning process as planners tried to devise a suitable course of action for Coalition forces which would assure victory with the least cost in lives and resources.³³

In his autobiography General Schwarzkopf related how the "Hail Mary" deception plan in support of the ground campaign came to fruition. It was born out of the concerns and fears he felt on October 6 when he received the initial brief for a "High-Risk Offensive Plan" for Operation Desert Storm. Following is his recollection of the analysis of the situation for the rejected battle plan:

It turned out to be exactly what I'd sketched on scrap paper almost two months before: attack straight into Kuwait and seize and hold the crucial highway junction northwest of the capital. Hearing the planners' presentation, I became certain that, unless the President sent more forces, this was the best possible approach--and I liked it now even less than when I'd thought of it myself. For one thing, the offensive lacked any element of surprise: it was a straight-up-the-middle charge right into the teeth of the Iraqi defenses.³⁴

The planners' envisioned high casualties from a battle of attrition, the type of war Saddam Hussein was willing to fight, but Schwarzkopf was not. General Schwarzkopf's planners had prepared to use deception activities if an offensive operations plan was executed, knowing from history the value of deception activities as "force multipliers." They knew they would need every advantage if intelligence estimates were correct that Saddam Hussein would have more than 500,000 troops on the ground by January 1991. Back then, in October 1990, Schwarzkopf's fighting forces were arrayed in a defensive posture along the Saudi border and were already outnumbered two to one.

General Schwarzkopf again:

I sat there imagining a half-dozen scenarios in which

the attack might bog down. If a division got in trouble, for example, there would be no help available: the plan called for the commitment of all U.S. and allied armored units, with none in reserve. Even if we succeeded in seizing the highway junction, Iraq could throw its huge army north of Kuwait against us in a counterattack....I also mistrusted that the forces our allies had promised would all show up in the theater in time, or that their governments would allow them to participate in an attack.³⁵

But, intelligence estimates indicated that though the enemy had significant numerical strength and an extensive military infrastructure, they also had significant weaknesses which included:

A rigid, top-down command and control system and the reluctance of Iraqi commanders to exercise initiative; ground forces and logistics especially vulnerable to air attack in desert conditions; a generally defensive approach to battle and limited ability to conduct offensive operations; an over-extended and cumbersome logistics system; an uneven quality of military forces, built around a limited number of Republican Guards divisions; faulty understanding of Coalition forces' operational capabilities; a limited ability to interfere with U.S. space-based assets; a limited air offensive capability; and ineffective foreign intelligence.³⁶

His ground forces were outnumbered and faced a formidable battle-tested army dug in for "siege warfare" in the desert. And, Iraqi forces were led by Saddam Hussein, an "actor" as "irrational" as Adolf Hitler. General Schwarzkopf "emphasized the need for a comprehensive plan to deceive Iraqi forces regarding Coalition intentions and to conceal the Coalition scheme of maneuver."³⁷ A deception operations plan was devised which involved all Coalition forces. It was designed to convince Saddam Hussein that Coalition forces would direct their main attack into Kuwait, supported by an amphibious

assault on the Kuwaiti coastline. "This deception played upon pre-existing Iraqi expectations," and General Schwarzkopf "implemented a plan which would reinforce those expectations."³⁸ The plan was also designed to "divert Iraqi forces from the Coalition main attack and to fix Iraqi forces in eastern Kuwait and along the Kuwaiti coast."³⁹ Deception operations would provide surprise and confuse the enemy under the cloak of air superiority, key elements for success in maneuver warfare on the modern battlefield.

General Schwarzkopf used all components in deception operations. Means used included "aggressive ground force patrolling, artillery raids, amphibious feints and ship movements, and air operations. Throughout, ground force units engaged in reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance operations with Iraqi forces to deny the Iraqis information about actual Coalition intentions."⁴⁰ "The Coalition's ability to deny airspace to Iraqi reconnaissance aircraft and its command of space helped to insure that the main effort to the west remained undetected throughout its long buildup after the air war started."⁴¹ Just like Eisenhower, Schwarzkopf fed his opponent the story he most wanted to believe: the Coalition would attack straight away into Kuwait into the strength of Saddam's army and fortifications. Everything pointed to that--information in the media, location of troops and naval forces, current operations. But it didn't play that way.

General Schwarzkopf, a master of the operational art,

may be best remembered in military history for the brilliant integration of deception into his campaign plan which enabled what he called the "Hail Mary play" of Desert Storm to succeed. On February 27, 1991, he briefed the American people on the strategy behind Desert Storm and put it this way:

I think this is one of the most important parts of the entire briefing....As you know, very early on, we took out the Iraqi air force...(and) for all intents and purposes, we took out his ability to see what we were doing down here in Saudi Arabia. Once we had taken out his eyes, we did what could best be described as the Hail Mary play....a massive movement of troops all the way out to the west, to the extreme west, because we knew he was still fixed in this area with the vast majority of his forces, and once the air campaign started, he would be incapable of moving out to counter this move, even if he knew we made it."⁴²

Once again, the importance of skillfully planned and executed deception operations to the success of this campaign cannot be overstated. DoD's Final Report to Congress on the conduct of the war called deception "key to achieving both tactical and operational surprise and, ultimately, the ground offensive's success."⁴³

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

This paper focused on the use of deception by U.S. commanders who must orchestrate military operations and campaigns at the operational level of war. Successive generations of military commanders have universally recognized that if surprise can be attained over the enemy and operations security maintained, deception may greatly contribute to achieving combat objectives and victory in war. Operational deception is a valuable tool of the operational art, recognized by commanders as a "force multiplier" they must add to their toolbox.

Through a historical review of deception concepts and doctrine, study of the eight planning considerations of U.S. Joint Doctrine for Operational Deception, and historical analysis of the successful use of deception in two campaigns, three conclusions are evident: synchronization of all plans is critical to the success of a campaign, deception should be a key element of any campaign plan, and future operational commanders must be well versed in the operational art and operational deception doctrine.

NOTES

1. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Basic National Defense Doctrine, Joint Pub 0-1 (Proposed Final Pub)(Washington: 7 May 1991), p. I-32.
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